

Lessons Learned Record of Interview

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1333 14 th St NW, Washington DC, 20005					
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AIOG and (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) • Creation of SRAP • Strategic reviews: quantity, international involvement, and gaps • ICAF: role and typical rollout plan • Designing better metrics • Competing priorities: Iraq v. Afghanistan; NSPD-44 v. DOD Directive 3000.05 • Portraying story of change: violence • Resources allotment and timing • Civilian Uplift • IMS/CRS • JIOC • Top Lessons 					

Introduction

SIGAR gave a brief introduction regarding the background of the Lessons Learned program and its effort to contextualize Afghanistan. Further, it was noted that we are seeking to understand security dynamics at the outset and how that was implemented into planning to reduce costs. Our aim is to talk processes, not critique policy and identify the gap between data. Additionally, we want to talk the security thread and how violence data allows us to track changes against things like the budget.


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Out initial aim is to answer: 1) was the budget responsive to the security environment and why were our initial planning systems over the first five years hap hazard?

Discussion

Career Background

(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C)



(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C)



The AIOG was a success because of Tony Harriman's leadership as the senior person. There were lots of meeting and the working groups were engaged. The interagency was making decisions and could actually get stuff done. The process would involve engaging the DASD-level then take the issue back to debate it within the AIOG, then Tony Harriman would take it to the White House and things would actually change.


OSD-Policy changed a lot because it was so massive. The State-led effort was not empowered, there was no debate and it was a sterile process of preparing and presenting papers. While AIOG was exhausting, at least it worked. The building of IMS, at least the Washington DC portion, was modeled off some of what AIOG did. Eventually decisions were getting sucked higher and higher and the working level became irrelevant. By 2009 there was a shift and State was more empowered.

Creation of SRAP

It was good in theory and there were higher stakes in 2009 compared to 2005 when no one was paying attention. So this meant more people in Washington D.C. at the lower level could muck around on decisions and this worried the interagency. IMS was critical and it was to institutionalize communication levels between: the field and D.C.; D.C. and the country teams; and the country teams and the NSC staff.

When I was out there early on, we could still travel easily to the provinces and we would often hear, for example, the top five concerns in provinces from PRTs, politicians or others, and we would take this information back to Kabul and their minds were blown about the lessons from the field.

Everyone seemed locked in place but travel was necessary piece of this work. You should talk to (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) as she basically set up the Afghan Army and Police. She was the (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C)



The Quantity and Role of Strategic Reviews

First, strategic reviews were taking the place of actual planning. If you had a review you would do mini reviews of progress rather than putting the energy into a comprehensive review. Additionally, this process would just annoy the NSC with so many questions. Reviews are a proxy for planning. Second, there were legitimate questions that the president wanted answered and reviews were used to answer those questions. They were trying to scratch this itch but nothing helped to get at the fundamental misgivings on some of these issues.

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This idea [regarding the role of strategic review supplanting strategic planning] was true with both presidents [George W. Bush and Obama]. There was one review under Bush that was passed to Obama and that review was used as a reset point. There was a call for reviews in order to make political shifts as it shows work was being done on policy development. Additionally, DOD cares a lot about reviews and every Commander did a review and most Ambassadors did too.

International Partners in the Review Process

Well, we had ICMAG but the glaring failure in it was not include talks with Afghans. There was no inclusion of Afghans yet they should have been included. It was assumed or suspected that, for example, our economic team was talking to the Afghan economic team. If so, then it would not be necessary to have Afghans in the room if this dialogue was going on through the embassy channels already.

Some raised the question of including international community too. First we needed to get our house in order. ISAF had a legitimate concern with ICMAG and how the U.S. government had a plan but there was no similar ISAF plan. The Commander needed to know their counterpart and their needs. We needed another plan for U.S./ISAF. A comprehensive approach would have been meaningful. If we had one person would know the main 5 pillars of what we are doing in Afghanistan. In 2005 I could say what we were doing because we had pillars.

Gaps in the Strategy Process

S/CRS had a gap between President Obama's speech, which was clear, and an Embassy plan; they needed something in between. We tried to develop the IPF but it was not picked up. It explained major mission elements, tasks and assigned levels.

ICAF Trial Runs

(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C)

However, RC-East was nervous about us going to PRTs without going through the brigade but there was no civilian equivalent at the brigade level. Brigades didn't follow an Afghan equivalent level or the RC level which created some chain-of-command issues. So our solution was that we started at the RC and established regional objectives then we would take those to the brigade level and after debate, would back brief the RC level. Then we would engage the provincial level and subsequently back-brief the brigade and RC levels. Everyone got a say and could affect changes. The military liked it because it followed chain-of-command but it still scared the embassy and the embassy would not let us talk to embassy staff.

(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C)

(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) would ask people what was needed in order to do assessments and used the nascent ICAF as a guide. We came up with many small influence diagrams and then NDU took them and merged them into one huge diagram. We asked what was going well and what was going poorly. This could tell you about what to continue to build or what cycles to break and how forces affect each other. It is still being implemented in other places but not Afghanistan.

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(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C)

1. Day one was assessment day. We would talk about what is going on in the province and at night, us leading the assessment, would go back and develop the basic cycles. These basic cycles were then shown to the group on day two to see if they resonated.
2. Day two, after looking at the possible cycles, would then be spent on how to build against this. For example, if we open schools, we know education is going on and we then build upon that cycle because it increases economic opportunities and increases small business opportunities. We could then think about continuing to build the program or expand it to other districts and tweak the education toward other options like vocational training.
3. Day three we would make a list of priorities in the province and see how the fit with objective set by the RC and assess their relevance against the RC objective. We could also then add or tweak objectives as necessary.
4. Day four we would sit with small groups and think about how to check progress once tasks were assigned. For example, how to measure an increase in economic opportunities? How is the district government working? This [assessing district governments] might be measured by driving by to see if people are on guard outside a district government building or if it simply appears open.

Food Security Data Collection and Usage

Every province had an agriculture guy present and they would report by province on things such as rice prices. Then the province would send that to Kabul and then back to State in D.C. but the information was not used. It was used only as way for saying someone did something. Data was essentially collected but not used.

Designing Better Metrics and

(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) All that people were doing was tracking violence but in a nonsensical way since they were only tracking incidents. This tells us nothing. People said that we can only track quantitative data. What we needed was to track the quantitative, qualitative and polling data in every province and have a set framework on what was needed there to do an assessment. Qualitative measures would be set on a scale and then line both the qualitative and quantitative up with the polling...triangulation. This approach worried because people of the subjective side of the analysis, e.g. the view of the PRT commander at the beginning and end of their deployment. We would use the qualitative to bind the subjective.

Problems with this approach included:

1. We needed embassy buy-in.
2. There would be a fight with the U.N. and ISAF since it was a comprehensive approach.
3. The embassy hated our reporting because of a "not developed here" mindset. Plus, [REDACTED] did not like it either.

Competing Priorities: Iraq/Afghanistan and NSPD-44 and DOD Directive 3000.05

Iraq and Afghanistan were spinning away with different interagency processes and there was a total disconnect between S/CRS [and NSPD-44] and DOD Directive 3000.05. Doing lessons learned inside and outside of the country were not going to happen. It was an "irrelevant effort in a theoretical space."

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Portraying the Story of Change: Violence

I would disconnect them [violence levels and type versus the narrative] to a certain degree. Every time data is shared it showed that everything was getting worse, especially with these strategic reviews. These strategic reviews are especially bad from a public affairs point of view. We have the green-on-blue attacks which all of a sudden became a problem when they began collecting data on it. Since there was no baseline on this, the data on these attacks was basically subjective.

The overall story was that there was only a small focus on the interagency process and it was massively under-resourced and under-attended. That said, being small is a blessing and a curse. When the effort is small you can have a greater impact by each person and there is a degree of easier decision making. There was just too little funding and a poor quality of individuals focused on Afghanistan.

Resources: Right Place, Right Time?

It was all too late. There is also a distinction between processes and decisions. While processes may have improved that did not necessarily result in better decision making; sometimes these decisions were also politicized. For example, State eventually gave up the role in training police due to a debate about the role of DOD taking place on the hill. Now it is hard to remember a time without the DOD! We are now used to DOD stepping in to accomplish things that are typically outside their role. There was also resistance by State to give up power in Iraq and the pol-mil officers were fighting tooth-and-nail to keep it.

Another example was in Farah. Our initial plans were to just get in and get out. That changed and in Farah they still did not have electricity by 2008 despite talk in early 2002 about using solar technology. At the time it was decided that solar would take too long, and by long it meant 6 months. Instead we purchased generators and fuel and funded convoys to transport the fuel.

There were so many sea changes regarding Afghanistan which also reflected political changes. There was debate on a few major issues [in relation to resources]:

1. The role of the U.S. military in the world.
2. The role of State.
3. The role of embassies.

Civilian Uplift and CEW

Section 1206 and 1207 authority set the stage outside of both the Iraq and Afghanistan issues. In 2008 (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) were the ones working on PRTs at the embassy. First, we needed to establish a civilian chain-of-command. There were lots of decisions at the brigade level and no equivalent at State or USAID. A decision was later made to modify this by pushing the decision making to the RC level. We needed several things at this stage including: 1) interagency chain-of-command; 2) people staffing this chain at every level; and 3) more people at the district level. (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) to get at these issues. At this time in D.C. talks started about the civilian uplift plan, a plan (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) drafted. It was a district support team concept and a civilian uplift. These plans were adulterated late in the game and complicated by DOD's plan for CEW.

CEW came from a need to have actual civilians and not just "DOD civilians" working this. So the solution was that because the civilian uplift was not happening fast enough, DOD pushed their own; which was not the right solution. These created a parallel brainchild. There was a massive gap in civilians between the two plans and a limited number of people who both want to go and have the skills.

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(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C)

SRAP is interesting because it is not like IMS and totally outside. Additionally, it had only one military advisor – Major General Fields. While the AIOG conversations lead to OSD opinions, it seemed that the SRAP was using the two-star general as a way to avoid OSD opinion or military operations.

IMS and S/CRS Outlook

IMS was never applied deliberately. If it would have been, it would have empowered S/CRS and personalities like (b)(6), (b)(7)(C). It seemed like S/CRS was not meant to succeed. S/CRS was mainly created through “y-billets” that were short term and seen as terminal billets. It was a career ender for an FSO so many did not want them. Only dead-enders sought these positions. Some good FSOs eventually did fill these spots and were passionate but (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) was taking people nowhere.

Despite some progress on ICAF and IMS, neither went anywhere. It is sad that IMS stalled because it is how we need to operate.

Joint Intelligence Operations Centers

This was just a group of guys having to do assessments while also having to fight a war. The AAG was just 6 people and they were old guys. What we need is to increase our capability to do assessments and to chase lots of information we are not currently getting from NGOs, the interagency, the U.N. and everyone assessing the situation. Mike Flynn warns that putting intelligence guys out in the field might not make the NGOs and other groups play nice. It is likely the military and NGOs won't talk. We need more unclassified conversations and more exposure. Ultimately, the assessment side conversation is easier than the intelligence side.

Top Lessons

1. Never do anything without leadership support.
2. Ensure clear communication between the field, country teams and Washington; have strong feedback loops.
3. Avoid gaps like the ones between the president's speech and the program management/implementation level; ensure the policy is clear at all levels.
4. Continuous assessment of the process. This will realistically be interpreted by strategic reviews which create strategic pauses to ask the big questions. While this is useful and the right of leadership we need to do it without sucking resources out of the system. Need to find a balance with useless assessments and too many metrics – must identify the most important metrics.
5. Identify what provincial leadership needs and get that information to the R.C so it can further be relayed to the embassy, the military and ultimately Washington D.C. This process allows decisions to be made so that the guy in the district can get the help that is necessary and improve accountability.